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Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the feasibility of harmonizing standards of air travel

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The current report, mandated by the General Assembly in resolutions 60/255, 62/238 and 63/268, examines the standards of travel in place for staff with a view to harmonizing them. The report notes that for agencies under the authority of the Secretary-General (the United Nations and funds and programmes) many of the key travel policies have already been harmonized, and suggests that further progress in this area can be achieved through increased participation by agencies in the Inter-Agency Travel Network.

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I. Background

1. Travel policies across the United Nations system have been the focus of several studies and reviews over the years. Recent analysis of the subject began with a 2005 report of the Joint Inspection Unit (see A/60/78), along with the associated note by the Secretary-General (A/60/78/Add.1). After considering those reports, the General Assembly, in its resolution 60/255 (sect. IV, para. 2), requested the Secretary-General to initiate, within the framework of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), a review of the standards of travel and entitlements for staff members, members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations and organizations of the United Nations system, with a view to adopting a common policy at the United Nations system level.

2. In response, the secretariat of CEB prepared, in 2007, a review of the travel policies (A/61/801) that included the results of a survey on the status of the travel policies and practices in place across the system. The survey, carried out in late 2006, was distributed through the Inter-Agency Travel Network (IATN) to approximately 38 intergovernmental organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system. A total of 17 entities (16 from the United Nations system and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) responded and provided an updated picture of the variation in travel policies in the two years since the Joint Inspection Unit report. The report concluded that travel policies continued to differ across the system, sometimes substantially, but mostly in the area of mission travel. For other categories of travel, the introduction of the lump sum payment options appeared to have lessened the differential somewhat, although the basis upon which those payments were made could vary from entity to entity.

3. During its sixty-second session, in section XV of resolution 62/238, the General Assembly took note of the above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General and endorsed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, which called for "a comprehensive report, on the basis of a CEB review and specific proposals, with a view to harmonizing standards of travel for staff of the United Nations common system, indicating the measures that can be implemented under the authority of the Secretary-General, as well as those that will require the approval of the General Assembly" (A/62/351, para. 5).

4. Subsequently, during its sixty-third session, the General Assembly, in section II of resolution 63/268, requested that the comprehensive report should include an evaluation of the use of mileage points accumulated from official travel as a mechanism for reducing the cost of air travel.

II. Conclusions

5. The inter-agency mechanisms, including the relevant subsidiary bodies of CEB, notably the Finance and Budget and Human Resources networks, have, over the years, discussed the possibility of increased harmonization of travel policies. In 2008, a joint Human Resources/Finance and Budget working group on travel policies agreed to the value of building on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit report of 2005, but concluded that the financial implications of any actions taken would need to be considered. Agencies also agreed to establish and

maintain a database as a repository of travel entitlements that would facilitate the sharing of travel policies and practices.

6. In addition, in response to the resolutions of the General Assembly requesting an examination of the measures that could be implemented under the authority of the Secretary-General, the secretariat of CEB carried out a further review, with the results compiled in the present report. In accordance with resolution 62/238, the review focused on the status of harmonization of travel policies among the United Nations Secretariat and funds and programmes, as those entities fell directly under the purview of the Secretary-General. The specialized agencies, reporting to independent governing bodies, fell outside the scope of the review. The Board contacted each of the entities involved, and the results of responding agencies (United Nations, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Food Programme (WFP) are summarized in the table annexed to this report.

7. The table reveals that for many aspects of travel, the funds and programmes already implement the standard used at the United Nations Secretariat. For the standard of accommodation for air travel, all surveyed agencies provide for business class travel irrespective of travel time for staff in the categories above D-2. Further, staff at the D-2 level and below have an entitlement of economy class, except for flights nine hours or above, when business class is authorized. In additional, terminal expense amounts have all been harmonized, with the exception that one agency (WFP) uses ad hoc rates for selected cities.

8. The survey also explored the continued use of the lump-sum option for the major categories of entitlement travel: appointment, repatriation, change of duty station, home leave and education. Of those categories, the agencies continue a harmonized approach, with some small variation, for home leave and education, utilizing 75 per cent (80 per cent for WFP) of the full economy fare. This is consistent with the benchmark suggested by the Joint Inspection Unit in recommendation 3 of its 2005 report.

9. Finally, as the table demonstrates, considerable variation remains in the use of the lump sum for categories of appointment, repatriation and change of duty station. Not all agencies have implemented the lump sum options, and where this option is available the amounts range from 75 per cent to 100 per cent of the appropriate category of travel.

10. In its resolutions 60/255, 62/238 and 63/268, the General Assembly requested that the review include measures that could be implemented under the authority of the Secretary-General to further harmonize travel policies and study the use of frequent flier miles to reduce the cost of travel. As demonstrated in the present report, the entities that fall within the authority of the Secretary-General have already achieved a significant degree of harmonization of travel policies. Therefore, the Assembly may wish to call upon the Secretary-General and the executive heads of the funds and programmes: (a) to continue harmonizing travel policies and practices, especially through IATN; and (b) to participate in, and fully support, IATN, as called for in a recent report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of travel arrangements within the United Nations system" (see A/65/338).

11. On the issue of frequent flyer miles, the Joint Inspection Unit addressed this point in paragraph 97 of the same report; it noted that "the majority of organizations do not have programmes for the recovery of frequent flyer miles (FFMs) for tickets purchased by them and stated that having such programmes for utilizing FFMs would be an expensive and cumbersome use of administrative resources". The Inspectors, in paragraph 98 of their report, concurred "that the management of organizational FFMs is cumbersome and also not equitable".

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Annex

Travel policies in the United Nations and funds and programmes

Standard	*UN Secretariat*	*UNDP*	*UNHCR*	*UNICEF*	*WFP*
Air travel for staff above D-2	Business class irrespective of travel time	Business class irrespective of travel time	Business class irrespective of travel time	Business class irrespective of travel time	Business class irrespective of travel time
Air travel for staff D-2 and below	Business class 9 hours or over	Business class 9 hours and above	Business class 9 hours and above	Business class 9 hours and above	Business class 9 hours and above
Terminal expenses	$63 — New York $38 — everywhere else No ad hoc rates for any locations	$63 — New York $38 — everywhere else No ad hoc rates for any locations	$63 — New York $38 — everywhere else No ad hoc rates for any locations	$63 — New York $38 — everywhere else No ad hoc rates for any locations	$63 — New York $38 — everywhere else Ad hoc ($50) for selected cities (London, Paris, Rome, Tokyo and Washington, D.C.)
Lump sum for appointment	Lump sum not available	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	Lump sum not available	100 per cent of the full IATA fare, economy if less than 9 hours, business class if 9 hours and above	80 per cent of the full IATA economy fare, business class 9 hours and above
Lump sum for repatriation	75 per cent of the full economy one-way fare.	No lump sum available	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	100 per cent of the full IATA fare, economy if less than 9 hours, business class if 9 hours and above	80 per cent of the full IATA economy fare, business class 9 hours and above
Lump sum for home leave	75 per cent of the full economy round trip fare	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	80 per cent of the full IATA economy fare, business class 9 hours and above

Standard	*UN Secretariat*	*UNDP*	*UNHCR*	*UNICEF*	*WFP*
Lump sum for change of duty station	Lump sum not available	No lump sum available	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	100 per cent of the full IATA fare, economy if less than 9 hours, business class if 9 hours and above	80 per cent of the full IATA economy fare, business class 9 hours and above
Lump sum for education	75 per cent of the full economy round trip fare	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	75 per cent of the full IATA economy fare	80 per cent of the IATA student fare, irrespective of flying time